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ABSTRACT

This pamphlet describes the functions of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and outlines principles and strategies for school-based community service programs that the CCSSO endorses. Essentially the CCSSO forms coalitions with many other educational organizations and is able to provide leadership for a variety of policy concerns that affect elementary and secondary education. Underlying the CCSSO's efforts is its commitment to network for equity in education for minorities, women, the handicapped, the limited English proficient, and low-income students. In school-based community services programs, students perform needed service in places such as hospitals, day-care centers, nursing homes, and libraries. They may serve as tutors, conduct special projects such as beautifying the campus, or feeding the homeless. (JAM)

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Community Service

Learning by Doing

A Statement of the Council of Chief State School Officers

November 1989

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The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

is a nationwide non-profit organization of the 57 public officials who head departments of public education in every state, the District of Columbia, the Department of Defense Dependents Schools, and five extra-state jurisdictions. CCSSO seeks its members' consensus on major education issues and expresses their views to civic and professional organizations, to federal agencies, to Congress, and to the public. Through its structure of committees and task forces, the Council responds to a broad range of concerns about education and provides leadership on major education issues.

Because the Council represents the chief education administrator, it has access to the educational and governmental establishment in each state and to the national influence that accompanies this unique position. CCSSO forms coalitions with many other education organizations and is able to provide leadership for a variety of policy concerns that affect elementary and secondary education. Thus, CCSSO members are able to act cooperatively on matters vital to the education of America's young people.

The CCSSO Resource Center on Educational Equity provides services designed to achieve equity in education for minorities, women and girls, and for disabled, limited English proficient, and low-income students. The Center is responsible for managing and staffing a variety of CCSSO leadership initiatives to provide better educational services to children and youth at risk to school success.

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School-based community service programs provide activities coordinated through the schools in which students, kindergarten through high school levels, perform needed services in their communities as part of their learning experience. School-based community service is related closely to the student's academic work and reinforces what is taught in the classroom. Through participation in community service programs, students learn by doing.

The Council of Chief State School Officers considers the provision of community service programs an important element of the Council's 1987 policy statement, "Assuring School Success for Students At Risk."

Learning through Service

The development of character, values and self-esteem are as important as is mastery of basic and occupational skills. Opportunities for learning through doing and active involvement in addressing community needs and providing services are instructional strategies which reinforce other types of learning and provide a foundation for student success in school and out. School-based community service programs provide opportunities and experiences for character development and academic growth.

In school-based community service programs, students perform needed service in places such as hospitals, day-care centers, nursing homes and libraries. They serve as tutors for other students in their school or other schools, and conduct special projects such as beautifying the school campus and the community or feeding residents in a homeless shelter. These programs are frequently integrated into the academic program and in some instances are offered for credit or required for graduation and when closely linked to the classroom they can reinforce learning by providing opportunities to use acquired information and skills.

For some students, school-based community service provides relevance for schooling, by relating the content of the classroom to the lives of people in their communities. This can be the key variable for the student who has not been successful and who finds community service to be the motivating force for school.

Key Principles for Effective School-based Community Service

School-based community service programs are part of the education strategy of learning by doing. They also benefit the community by providing needed services. To be effective, programs should include the following elements:

- School-based community service programs should be open to all students, regardless of academic background or physical ability.
- School-based community service should be well connected to the student's academic and vocational study, and the concept of service should be integrated into the kindergarten through grade 12 curricula.
- School-based community service programs should include a) training for teachers, students, and placement supervisors; and b) collaboration on service project activities with existing youth serving and community-based organizations and where possible with colleges and universities.
- School-based community service programs should provide for a structured period for reflection after the service experience, when the students can think, talk, and/or write about what they saw and did.
- Students should take an active part in the development of the service project and have responsibility for affecting the direction of the project.

Benefits of Service Learning

When school-based service programs are thoughtfully designed and incorporate the key elements noted above, they provide strong links between schools and community and productive ways for youth to connect with adults and peers. The benefits to students are: *intellectual development and academic learning; personal growth and development; and social growth and development.*

Recommendations for State Support of School-Based Community Service

State education agency (SEA) leadership is essential in supporting the role of school-based community service in education and actively assisting local school systems to develop effective programs. State educators can use these strategies to support school-based community service initiatives:

1. Assign state education agency staff to assist in organizing and coordinating local community service programs. While program development and implementation should remain local issues, SEA staff can act as liaisons among local programs, give guidance on state-level curriculum requirements, and provide other types of technical assistance and coordination.

2. Provide incentives such as grants, to local school districts for developing community service programs. Even small grants can provide incentives for local districts and schools.

3. Require or strongly urge local school districts to offer community service for elective academic credit.

4. Provide in-service training/staff development seminars on ways to incorporate community service into the curriculum. Once introduced to the idea, local staff are likely to develop new and creative ways of addressing community needs through students' curriculum-related activities.

5. Assist local school districts in evaluating their community service programs. Guidelines or instruments could be designed to assist in evaluation by staff, students and placement supervisors.

6. Sponsor or co-sponsor conferences on strategies for improving school-community relationships. Illustrate ways in which school-based community service programs can benefit both the student and the community.

7. Organize and maintain a clearinghouse on community service programs, publications, and service opportunities available in the state.

8. Develop and disseminate written policies endorsing community service as part of the school curriculum.

9. Demonstrate support for community service programs. For example, endorse community service initiatives in state education agency speeches and publications. Highlight existing community service programs in state education agency and state board newsletters.

Conclusion

Although the concept of school-based community service is not a new one, the move by some states and school districts to require service for graduation or at least offer community service as a credit course toward graduation has given it new momentum. School-based community service programs can provide all students, regardless of academic accomplishments, socio-economic background or ethnicity, opportunities to observe, question, analyze, synthesize and to develop the intellectual skills necessary to learn. Students in community service programs have opportunities to develop skills in situations such as counseling, teaching, management, social-research, and case management. Through participation in these programs, students also develop problem solving and critical thinking skills and have exposure to a variety of job settings, role models and individuals in the community.

The Council of Chief State School Officers is committed to assure each student the full range of opportunities for successful completion of high school and joins other education leaders to support and encourage development and implementation of school-based community service programs and strategies to sustain these programs.